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I.—CHARACTER-DRAWING IN THUCYDIDES.¹

"Thucydides aims," says Bruns,² in substance, "in a strictly objective way to represent the course of history itself, not to give a succession of individual pictures. To only a few preferred individuals does the historian give such distinctive features, and these sparingly touched, as lift them from the mass. The private life and personal character of historical personages come into consideration only as these influence the course of public events. He avoids passing judgment in his own name on historical characters; hence independent characterizations of individual men, apart from the narrative, are excluded. Thucydides' abstention from characterizations is at first a disappointment to us; his exclusion of social and literary affairs from his narrative is a cause of regret to all, and of anger to Mr. Mahaffy. And yet, the more we think of it, the more we are inclined to justify Thucydides, at least as to the matter of characterizations. Besides, it is greater art to make the narration and grouping of facts convey judgments, whether of commendation or condemnation, than to pronounce opinions. If we can only be sure of the facts, the rest will take care of itself. The clear and truthful statement of events is history herself pronouncing judgment. In the long lapse of ages that is the safest plan. More light on events, changed points of view, may reverse the judgments of even the greatest and best-intentioned historian; facts stand and carry their judgment with them. Some such

¹ Presidential address at the meeting of the American Philological Association at New Haven, July 7, 1903.

² Ivo Bruns, *Das Literarische Porträt der Griechen*, 1896.

austere view of the historian's function Thucydides seems to have held, and when we read the whole history with this idea in mind we can but admire his reserve and self-restraint. He "knew how to make great events tell their own story greatly; and the dramatic power of the immortal history is heightened by its dramatic reserve."

Thucydides concentrates, then, his whole power on the presentation of the kernel of events and refrains from characterizations. And yet he does give us very real pictures of some of his men. How does he accomplish this? Two ways are open to him—narration of their deeds and the dramatic presentation of the motives at work, in their speeches. "Thucydides gives us distinct portraits of the chief actors of the Peloponnesian War, but these portraits are to be found in the clearly narrated actions of the men; the words ascribed to them rarely do more than mark the stronger lines of character."¹ This remark of Jebb's is doubtless true in general; but in some cases, as even Bruns agrees, the speeches seem to be a dramatic presentation of this or that speaker's individual views and meant to bring the speaker's personality before us, in other words, to be in effect a characterization.

To the small list of preferred characters whom the historian treats not as types, but as individuals of clearly marked features and impressive personality, belong, on the one side, especially Pericles, Cleon, Nicias, Alcibiades, Demosthenes, on the other, Archidamus, Brasidas, Gylippus, Hermocrates. To these might be added a few minor—at least by comparison minor—characters, e.g., the Athenians Phormio and Paches, and the Spartans Alcidas and Sthenelaidas; though the very distinct portrait of the last-named—given in a single short speech—seems intended rather as typical of the Spartan ephor as such than as representing the individual. Still three others Thucydides makes to stand out from the mass, either by narration of facts or by brief characterizations, namely, the Spartan Pausanias and the Athenians Themistocles and Antiphon; the first two of course not as belonging to the war, but as chief factors in the events which led to the supremacy of Athens. The characterization of Themistocles indeed gives more directly than in any other case the subjective judgment of the historian, and is measurably full, as was allowable

¹"The Speeches of Thucydides," in *Hellenica*, 1880.

perhaps, seeing that Themistocles was the founder of Athenian naval supremacy, on which the fortunes of the war depended.

But the exigencies of space and time compel me to choose even among these few especially preferred characters of the history. And so I shall attempt to point out Thucydides' method of character-drawing, and to give a clear idea of what he thereby accomplishes, by four chief personages: Brasidas and Cleon, Nicias and Gylippus. These are so set counter to each other in the history as to bring out more effectively by contrast each other's strength and weakness.

I may be pardoned, however, for digressing for a moment from this plan, in order to cast a glance at the greatest character of Athenian political history, as Thucydides represents him. The rule of the history—the march of events with no especial emphasis upon the individual—applies to the great Pericles just as to lesser characters.¹ In Book I his name occurs several times as leader of the Athenian troops (I. 111, 114, 116, 117). There he is a part of the course of events. Suddenly history thrusts him forward as the dominant factor. The Lacedaemonian ambassadors, in the negotiations preceding the declaration of war, demand that the Athenians “drive out the pollution of the goddess.” They did this, according to Thucydides, nominally in behalf of religion, but really because they knew that Pericles was connected with the Cylonian matter on the mother's side, and because they thought if he should be banished what they hoped from the Athenians would readily come to them. They did not, however, expect that he would suffer this so much, as that he would come into ill-repute with the state, in that the war would be in part due to the misfortune of his relationship. For, being the most influential man of his time and the leader of the state, he opposed the Lacedaemonians in all things, not permitting the Athenians to yield, but urging them to war.² “At this moment,” says Bruns, “history is concentrated in this one person, because the opposing party single him out as their most dangerous enemy, and the situation becomes not Sparta against Athens, but Sparta against Pericles.” We are told presently that Pericles, fearing that Archidamus, the traditional guest-friend of his family, out of good-will, or the Spartan state, out of malice, may spare his estate and thus bring him into

¹ See Bruns, p. 4 ff.

² i. 126 f.

discredit, turns his property over to the state;¹ this is told, however, not to glorify Pericles, but as an historical fact. Beyond this we shall learn nothing directly of his personal character and private life more than of lesser personages; indeed, not so much as of Cleon and Alcibiades. For Pericles' public action is not influenced by personal interests, as in their case; in him we see simply the intellect at work in the sphere of politics.

From this time to his death Pericles is the most prominent figure in the history, and the narrative becomes in reality a valuation of the great statesman's ideals and of his policy. And yet, in conformity with the law of style imposed upon himself, Thucydides gives us, even in the three speeches, only historical facts; so grouped, however, that the resulting picture of the man is more vivid and permanent than the characterization recorded in Book II, c. 65. "Thucydides has herein accomplished," says Bruns, "a masterpiece in objective historical composition. Three historical moments when Pericles is the speaker are realistically reproduced, but through the choice of these occasions and the inner connection given to them, there comes out behind the questions of the day that are discussed a definitive and convincing picture of the man's spiritual being."

We can but marvel at the historian's economy in the disposition of the materials at his disposal for representing Pericles as supreme political factor. There are only three significant occasions in which Pericles speaks: (1) to show that war is inevitable and to outline his policy;² (2) to defend that policy and himself, and to hearten his despondent countrymen;³ (3) in the Funeral Oration,⁴ "that splendid monument of his grave enthusiasm for Athens," to show what manner of state they are fighting for, to give "a picture of Athens in her social glory well calculated both to rouse the pride and nerve the courage of her citizens." "Seeking ground of consolation for the survivors, he could not avoid," says Bruns, "setting forth the moral worth and the cultural significance of the state, the 'School of Hellas' for whose honor and preservation these men had offered their lives." "Fix your eyes," says Pericles, "upon the greatness of Athens until you become filled with the love of her, and in the presence of the spectacle of her glory reflect that this empire has been acquired by men who knew their duty and dared to do it." What an im-

¹ ii. 13.² i. 140-144.³ ii. 60-64.⁴ ii. 35-46.

pression we get from this great speech, not only of the glory of the state, but of the dignity of the man! "Every reader of the Funeral Oration must be aware," says Jebb, "of a majesty in the rhythm of the whole, a certain union of impetuous movement with lofty grandeur, which Thucydides has ascribed to Pericles alone." In book II. c. 65, on the announcement of the death of Pericles, the historian gives a subjective characterization, masked it is true as an explanation of an historical fact, which summarizes and to some extent supplements the qualities embodied in the speeches. This characterization and the three speeches, if repeatedly and carefully studied, give an impressive and abiding picture of Pericles the statesman. But tempting as it is to dwell upon the character and qualities of Pericles, I must proceed to the discussion of the four characters selected to exemplify the historian's method of drawing character.

After Pericles, Brasidas seems to be the favorite character of the historian. "Brasidas," says Classen, "whom Thucydides distinguishes as the most capable general of the Spartans, is from the first portrayed with warm interest even in minor details of his activity." He first appears in a minor exploit, but one thoroughly characteristic, and we feel at once the historian's sympathy with the man. An Athenian and Corcyraean force, disembarked from 50 ships, was attacking Methone. "Now Brasidas, son of Tellis, a Spartan," says Thucydides, "happened to be in those parts keeping guard, and, seeing the danger, came to the aid of the inhabitants with a hundred hoplites. He made his way through the scattered parties of Athenian troops, whose attention was occupied with the fortress, and threw himself into Methone, suffering a slight loss; he thus saved the place. The exploit was publicly acknowledged at Sparta, Brasidas being the first Spartan who obtained this distinction in the war." The real Brasidas is now before us. His great career begun on that occasion is not more conspicuous in deeds during the next nine years (431-422) than their representation through bare recital of facts in Thucydides' austere history is life-like and effective.

In his next brief appearances the same Brasidas is always before us, whether in the speech of the Lacedaemonian commanders (II. 87)—in which I seem to detect the Brasidean ring; the feigned attack on Naupactus (ii. 90) which drew the shrewd Phormio, against his will, into the narrow bay; or the

audacious plan to surprise the Peiraeus (II. 93)—the plan, I say, not its execution, for what Brasidas planned he at least attempted to carry out; or in the single mention of him in book III (c. 79), where as adviser of the incompetent admiral Alcidas, he vainly urged a speedy attack upon Corcyra when there was much confusion and fear in the city.

At Pylos we see again the intrepid and desperate fighter. The Peloponnesian fleet is attempting to land in its attack upon the Athenian fort that had been established on Lacedaemonian soil. The situation is extremely difficult, since the narrow space allows only a few ships to come up at a time; and so, resting and fighting by turns, they make their attack with great spirit, loudly exhorting one another to force the enemy and take the fort. Brasidas distinguished himself above all others.—*πάντων δὲ φανερώτατος Βρασιδᾶς ἐγένετο*, says Thucydides. He was captain of a ship, and, seeing his fellow captains, if they could not land anywhere, hesitating and afraid of running their ships on the rocks, he called out to them: "Don't spare timber when the enemy have built a fort in our country; wreck the ships and force a landing!" Thus upraiding the others, he compelled his own pilot to run his ship aground, and made for the gangway. But in attempting to disembark he was knocked down by the Athenians, and after receiving many wounds swooned away and fell into the fore part of the ship; his shield dropped off his arm into the sea, and, being washed ashore, was taken up by the Athenians and used for the trophy which they raised after their victory.¹

In the year 424 occurs a daring exploit, the exact parallel of that at Methone: this time by a rush with 300 picked men he saves the city of Megara from the Athenians. A little later in the same year he is sent to Chalcidice to the dissatisfied allies of Athens, in order by a diversion to draw off the Athenians from the coasts of Laconia. Here² Thucydides works into the narrative a capital characterization, as an explanation of the Chalcidians' desire for Brasidas. "He was even more willing to go," says Thucydides, "than they were to send him. The Chalcidians too desired to have him, for at Sparta he had always been considered a man of energy. And on this expedition he proved invaluable to the Lacedaemonians. At the same time he gave an impression of justice and moderation in his behavior to the cities, which

¹ iv. 11 f.

² iv. 81.

induced many of them to revolt, while others were betrayed into his hands. Thus the Lacedaemonians were able to lighten the pressure of war upon Peloponnesus, and when shortly afterward they desired to negotiate, they had places to give in return for what they sought to recover. And at a later period of the war, after the Sicilian expedition, the honesty and ability of Brasidas, which some had experienced and of which others had heard the fame, mainly attracted the Athenian allies to the Lacedaemonians. For as he was the first who was sent out and proved himself to be in every way a good man, he left in their minds a firm conviction that others would be like him." Note the complimentary terms which Thucydides here applies to his hero, hiding himself under a Chalcidian mask: "man of energy" (*δραστήριος*), "just and moderate" (*δίκαιος καὶ μέτριος*), "honest and of clear insight" (*ἀρετῇ καὶ ξύνεσις*), "in every way a good man" (*κατὰ πάντα ἀγαθός*). Compare also a remark of Thucydides himself relative to Brasidas' cleverness in speech, as displayed in negotiations of this period. "For a Lacedaemonian he was not a bad speaker,"¹ says the austere historian, from whom a word of praise is a eulogy. Of Brasidas' expedition to Amphipolis (424), where he outgeneraled Thucydides and thus caused the banishment of that commander, the historian states the facts without a word of self-justification. But we learn that "the cities which were subject to Athens, when they heard of the taking of Amphipolis and of Brasidas' promises and of his gentleness, were more impatient than ever to rise, and privately sent embassies to him, asking him to come and help them, every one of them wanting to be the first."²

The next exploit of Brasidas was one to test to the fullest his courage and presence of mind. When he and Perdiccas had determined to withdraw from the country of the Illyrians, the Macedonians fell into an unaccountable panic and decamped *en masse* in the night. Brasidas quickly arranged his troops for an orderly retreat, and encouraged his men in a short speech which, whether ever made or not, clearly sets forth, we may accept, the motives underlying his conduct on this trying occasion. "Mobs like these," said he, "if an adversary withstand their first attack, do but threaten at a distance and make a flourish of valor; although, if one yields to them, they are brave enough to run after him when there is no danger."³ The result was as he had anticipated, and his whole army escaped without loss.

¹ iv, 84.² iv. 118.³ iv. 126.

When Brasidas and Cleon are opposed to each other in the Amphipolis campaign, in September, 422, Thucydides attributes to the soldiers of Cleon sentiments which are undoubtedly his own. "The soldiers," said he, "drew comparisons between the generals; what skill and enterprise might be expected on the one side, and what ignorance and cowardice on the other."¹ It was as the soldiers expected. When Cleon, after his reconnaissance, was moving off with his army in disorder, Brasidas, having selected 150 hoplites to make the first attack, exhorted the army in characteristic style. "Do not show weakness, seeing what is at stake," he concluded, "and I will show you that I can not only advise others, but fight myself." Then, when he observed the general retreat of Cleon's army, he shouted, "Those men do not mean to face us; see how their spears and their heads are shaking; such behavior always shows that an army is going to run away. Open the gates and let us at them!"²

Brasidas' onset with his 150 hoplites upon the Athenian center, speedily supported by the main body, was entirely successful. The sudden attack at both points created a panic. "Cleon, who had never intended to remain," says Thucydides, "fled at once and was overtaken and slain." But unfortunately the brave Brasidas was fatally wounded in the melee, and, like Wolfe at Quebec, survived only long enough to learn that his army was victorious. Thucydides does not pronounce a eulogy upon, or even give a formal characterization of, the dead hero, though he does honor him with a full statement of facts, which amounts to a eulogy. "Brasidas was buried," he says, "with public honors in front of the agora. The whole body of the allies, in military array, followed him to the grave. The Amphipolitans enclosed his sepulchre, and to this day they sacrifice to him as a hero, and also celebrate games and yearly offerings in his honor."³ This is the fullest statement of the kind in Thucydides.

If Brasidas is Thucydides' favorite character, Cleon is his especial aversion. In his case alone the historian abandons his constant attitude of self-restraint and impartiality. In all others he leaves to the facts of history the verdict of approval or condemnation; in the case of Cleon he breaks this reserve. Grote, who is inclined to defend Cleon, suspects the cause to be

¹ v. 7.² v. 10.³ v. 11.

personal—the fact that Cleon was the reputed accuser when the historian was sentenced to banishment. At any rate, Cleon is introduced on his first appearance with words that betray the historian's strong aversion: "Cleon, the son of Cleaenetus, who also had carried the former decree of death, being in other respects the most violent of the citizens, and by far the most persuasive at that time with the demos, came forward and spoke."¹ It was not his first appearance before the Athenian assembly, for he was already recognized, as seen above, as the speaker "most persuasive with the demos," and we know from Plutarch that he had risen into importance a few years earlier, during the lifetime of Pericles and as an opponent of his. Thucydides characterizes Cleon by making him at times an imitator of the language of the great Pericles. Classen says, "Thucydides probably purposely puts into the mouth of Cleon turns of thought and expression which are clearly echoes of the speeches of Pericles. Cp. III. 38. 1; 40. 4. Far as Cleon was removed from him in mind and mode of thinking, he had yet learned from him what was effective in a speech." Rather, it seems to me, a subtle and adroit way the historian has of characterizing the demagogue; for it is, as Professor Shorey remarks, "the seamy side of the Periclean ideal" that Cleon represents. Thucydides reserves him until a crisis in which he plays a thoroughly characteristic rôle, one which merits and meets with our unqualified horror and condemnation. The proposition which he had carried in the ecclesia and was now defending was to kill all Mitylenaeans of military age—about 6,000—and to sell as slaves the women and children. We shall find him two years later carrying a like decree "to destroy Scione and put the citizens to the sword." The speech of Cleon² is one of the most remarkable recorded in Thucydides and justifies the terms employed to characterize him, "most violent" (*βιαίωτατος*) and "most persuasive with the people" (*τῷ δήμῳ πιθανώτατος*).

His next important appearance is in a rôle as characteristic as that against the Mytilenaeans. This time he is the blustering demagogue.³ When the Lacedaemonians, in dismay at the situation of their troops in Sphacteria, offered very advantageous terms to the Athenians, these, reflecting that now it was in their

¹ iii. 36.² iii. 37-40.³ iv. 21-23 and 26 ff.

power at any time to make peace, followed Cleon and demanded more. But the blockade of the island spun itself out interminably, and the watch became harassing to the Athenians. Cleon, knowing that he was becoming an object of general mistrust because he had stood in the way of peace, first boldly challenged the reports from Pylos. Then, when he himself was delegated to go and inspect the situation, he urged rather to send a fleet against the island. "He declared sarcastically that if the generals were good for anything they might easily sail to the island and take the men; that he would do it if he were general." This was intended for Nicias, whom Cleon hated. Nicias promptly offered to resign in Cleon's favor, and he then tried to back out. "But the more Cleon declined the proffered command and tried to retract, the more the multitude, as their manner is, urged Nicias to resign and shouted to Cleon that he should sail."¹ So he had to undertake the expedition. But choosing as colleague, Demosthenes, who was in command at Pylos and the ablest Athenian general of the war, and already purposing an attack upon the island, he vauntingly said that in twenty days he would be back with the Lacedaemonians as prisoners or would slay them on the spot. "His vain words," says Thucydides, "moved the Athenians to laughter; nevertheless the wiser sort of men were pleased when they reflected that of two good things they could not fail to obtain one—either there would be an end of Cleon, which they would have greatly preferred, or, if they were disappointed, he would put the Lacedaemonians into their hands." Evidently the historian is giving his own feeling in the general sentiment. But the "mad" promise of Cleon was made good; for he did bring back the prisoners within twenty days.

Cleon's success at Sphacteria, however, was to be his own undoing. He persuades the Athenians, in 422, to send him in command of an expedition to the Chalcidian cities. His opponent was Brasidas. They met at Amphipolis, where Thucydides two years before had been outgeneraled by the same commander. His soldiers had no confidence in him and had unwillingly followed him from Athens; their mistrust was speedily justified. When Brasidas made his impetuous assault with 150 men upon the center of Cleon's army, the Athenians were terrified at his

¹ Perhaps the only passage where the serious historian allows himself to betray a feeling for humor.

audacity, and "Cleon indeed, who had never intended to remain, fled at once, and, being overtaken by a Myrcinian targeteer, was slain."¹ "Brasidas and Cleon," says Thucydides by way of summary, "had been the two greatest enemies of peace—the one because the war brought him success and reputation, the other because he fancied that in quiet times his rogueries would be more transparent and his slanders less credible."²

Ingenious attempts have often been made to reverse the verdict of history in the case of one and another arch-sinner. The effort has been made to whitewash, at least to exculpate, Cleon, notably by Grote. But in Cleon's case more explicitly than in any other, Thucydides has departed from his rule to state facts, not pronounce judgments. In few words, but unmistakably, he has condemned Cleon; his aversion to him is as undisguised as his sympathy with Brasidas is apparent. The world has too long believed in the self-restraint and impartiality of Thucydides to be convinced now, that his aversion to Cleon was due to a personal grudge. Thucydides had suffered at the hands of both Brasidas and Cleon: by the former he had been outgeneraled; on the latter's motion he had been banished. The one he admires; the other he despises. The verdict of his history is likely to stand in both cases. As Thucydides represents him, Brasidas was not only a thunderbolt of war, but a military genius of the first order; he was a forcible and persuasive speaker, a winning personality, a magnetic man who inspired confidence and drew men to him, whether as military commander or as political ambassador. In the case of Cleon, the greatest historian and the greatest satirist of the world, who knew all the facts, have both branded him as the arch-demagogue; and their verdict will stand. Cleon is pilloried forever.

We have been allowed to know more of the personality of Cleon than of Pericles or of Brasidas. The reason is doubtless, as Bruns says, that the personality of Cleon influences his public actions: hence we are permitted to know not merely the politician and soldier, but the rude, violent, vain, swaggering man. We have, too, a psychological analysis of his motives, because we could not otherwise understand his historical rôle. We shall find this still more marked in the case of Nicias.

Of the chief men in the Peloponnesian War, Nicias is perhaps relatively the least important, as far as real ability and force of

¹ v. 6-11.

² v. 16.

character are concerned; but we have a fuller psychological analysis, we are allowed to see deeper into his soul than any other man's. The reason is that his is a more complicated nature; in him the most varying motives cross each other. Fate makes him play a conspicuous rôle; for by reason of his wealth, his public spirit, his consistently just conduct, his reputation for success, the people have confidence in him. He is the exponent of the peace party. Fate and the people's faith make him, against his will, the leader of the fateful Sicilian expedition, and, because he is unequal to the task, he becomes the cause of his country's overthrow. Because therefore of the rôle he had to play, if not for his ability and force of character, the history should give a full and clear picture of him; and it does.

Nicias first becomes prominent in the history when, answering Cleon's taunts in the Sphacterian matter, he offered to yield the command to him. We have seen the outcome above. As the representative of the peace party at Athens and the chief opponent of Cleon, he becomes still more prominent after the other's death. "Nicias, the son of Niceratus, who had been the most fortunate general of his day," says Thucydides,¹ "became more eager than ever to make an end of the war. He desired whilst he was still successful and held in repute, to preserve his good fortune; he would have liked to rest from toil, and to give the people rest; and he hoped to leave behind him to other ages the name of a man who in all his life had never brought disaster on the city. He thought that the way to gain his wish was to trust as little as possible to fortune and to keep out of danger; and that danger would be best avoided by peace."

Here, under the form of an explanation of his position as representative of the peace party, we have really a characterization. Up to this point, he has played an important rôle in a worthy manner; but for the Sicilian expedition he would have come down to us, not indeed as a great statesman and general, but as a safe leader who had deserved well of his country. It is the irony of fate that Nicias, who saw so clearly the folly and even the danger of this expedition—so complete a departure from Pericles' policy—, that Nicias, chief representative of the peace party and anti-imperialist as he was, should have been forced by the people's confidence in his integrity and ability, to take the

¹ v. 16.

chief command in that imperialistic enterprise, and should not only become the chief cause of the failure of the expedition, but lose his own life and reputation.

Five days after the expedition had been voted, in an assembly called to consider its immediate equipment, Nicias, who had been elected general against his will,¹ thinking that upon slight and flimsy grounds they were aspiring to the conquest of Sicily, which was no easy task, said, among other things:² "I tell you that in going to Sicily you are leaving many enemies behind you, and seem to be bent on bringing new ones hither. We should not run into danger and seek to gain a new empire before we have fully secured the old. On behalf of our country, now on the brink of the greatest danger which she has ever known, I entreat you to hold up your hands against it." But the people were the more resolved upon war, and Nicias, thinking that he might possibly change their minds by the magnitude of the equipment asked for, demanded a force more magnificent and costly than had ever been sent out by any single Hellenic power. "The result disappointed him. Far from losing their enthusiasm at the disagreeable prospect, they were more determined than ever; they approved of his advice, and were confident that every chance of danger was now removed. All alike were seized with a passionate desire to sail, the elder among them convinced that they would achieve the conquest of Sicily; at any rate such an armament could suffer no disaster; the youth were longing to see with their own eyes the marvels of a distant land, and were confident of a safe return; the main body of the troops expected to receive present pay, and to conquer a country which would be an inexhaustible mine of pay for the future. The enthusiasm of the majority was so overwhelming that although some disapproved, they were afraid of being thought unpatriotic if they voted on the other side, and therefore held their peace."³

The chief cause of the fateful expedition was Alcibiades; but in the conduct of the enterprise the destiny of Athens came to rest in the unwilling hands of Nicias. Alcibiades, after he had become a traitor, did what resentment and diabolical cleverness could avail to damage his country; but the unhappy Nicias was the chief instrument of fate in the disaster. "The simple course of historical events becomes an indirect characterization of the

¹ vi. 8.² vi. 9-14.³ vi. 24.

man." The narration and grouping of events show unmistakably the historian's condemnation of the unfortunate general whom he never blames in word. And why should he condemn in word, when the facts do it inevitably and irrevocably? The historian's narrative of facts makes only too plain that Nicias was over-cautious, irresolute, procrastinating, afraid of the demos, superstitious. The one excuse that could have been urged for Nicias was that he was suffering from an incurable disease. But as Thucydides does not accuse, so he does not excuse; he simply mentions the fact.¹

Perhaps it is allowable to see in the summary of Nicias' views,² given in the council of Athenian commanders after the defeat on Epipolae, a masked characterization and even condemnation of the unfortunate Nicias. Demosthenes had urged instant withdrawal from Syracuse; Nicias acknowledges that the situation is bad and that it is best to retreat, but is loath to admit this openly; he tries to persuade himself that the affairs of the Syracusans are even worse off than their own; besides he fears the demos at Athens. Overcautiously weighing all the pros and cons, he is inclined both ways. Against withdrawal he sets probable accusations of treachery on the part of hostile orators at home. Not knowing what to do, he did nothing; though it was more important to come to some positive conclusion than that the conclusion should be right.

Let us now summarize briefly the cardinal mistakes of Nicias, as they may be gathered from Thucydides' narration of facts. (1) Nicias rejects Lamachus' advice to sail direct to Syracuse and fight as soon as possible under the walls.³ Formidable at first, by wasting the winter at Catana he fell into contempt and allowed time for succor to come from Peloponnesus. (2) Learning of Gylippus' approach and despising the small number of his ships, at first he set no watch; then, when he did send four ships to intercept him, was *too late*.⁴ (3) Lets Gylippus get into Syracuse by way of Euryâlus.⁵ (4) Allows Gylippus to surprise and take the fort Labdalon.⁶ (5) Sends twenty ships to waylay at the Porthmus the Corinthian succors for Syracuse, but *too late*.⁷ (6) Allows Gylippus to build in the night the Syracusan crosswall past the Athenian wall of circumvallation.⁸

¹ vii. 15.² vii. 48.³ vi. 49.⁴ vii. 1.⁵ vii. 4, 7.⁶ vii. 3.⁷ vii. 2.⁸ vii. 6.

(7) Permits Gylippus to surprise and capture Plemmyrium, with the result that the Syracusans were henceforth "masters of the mouth of the harbor on both sides, so that not a single storeship could enter without a convoy and a battle."¹ (8) Allows Gylippus and the Syracusans to send to southern Italy and cut off a supply fleet meant for the Athenians.² (9) Is deceived by a ruse and drawn into a seafight when the men are unprepared and hungry.³ (10) Rejects the proposition of Demosthenes and Eurymedon to leave Sicily immediately after the failure of the night-attack on Epipolæ.⁴ (11) Having finally consented, in view of matters getting worse and worse, to lead off the army, he is frightened by an eclipse of the moon and gives orders, obeying the injunction of the soothsayers, to wait still twenty-seven days.⁵ (12) Fooled by the messengers of Hermocrates, on the night after the great seafight, he postpones immediate departure.⁶

That is the last mistake. All had been made that were possible, or necessary to, the catastrophe that was now inevitable. The expedition was one series of costly errors committed with the best motives on the part of a brave and patriotic but not great man. On the retreat, Nicias behaves heroically and energetically, but it avails nothing. "He had hoped," says Thucydides, "to leave behind him to the ages the name of a man who in all his life had never brought disaster on the city." But note the Sophoclean irony in those other words with which the same historian sums up the disaster of the last expedition which Nicias led: "Of all the Hellenic actions which are on record, this was the greatest—the most glorious to the victors, the most ruinous to the vanquished; for they were utterly and at all points defeated, and their sufferings were prodigious. Fleet and army perished from the face of the earth; nothing was saved, and of the many who went forth few returned home."

Does this Thucydidean picture of Nicias, as gathered from the facts narrated, comport with the historian's remark that "Nicias of all the Hellenes of his time least deserved so to perish, on account of the whole course of his life regulated according to virtue?"⁷ Jebb thinks, "The fate of Nicias seemed to Thucydides a signal example of unmerited misfortune, since Nicias had been remarkable throughout life for the practice of

¹ vii. 22, 23.² vii. 25.³ vii. 39-41.⁴ vii. 48, 49.⁵ vii. 50.⁶ vii. 73, 74.⁷ vii. 86.

orthodox virtue." But the facts as narrated make it impossible to accept this as Thucydides' view. It is simply a statement by the historian of the popular impression of such a life, as Bruns expresses it; or, it may be, as Professor Shorey puts it, that the famous words "convey quite as much irony or sense of dramatic contrast as moral affirmation;" or it may be an expression of skepticism.

The character of Gylippus, the Spartan commander at Syacuse, is in marked contrast with that of Nicias. Doubtless Thucydides intended by this contrast that we should feel the more strongly the essential weakness of Nicias—his over-cautiousness; his incapacity to seize unerringly, and utilize instantaneously the critical moment for action. Gylippus, in courage, energy, coolness, resolute and prompt action, is a second Brasidas. He was probably not, though we have no means of knowing, also a diplomat and statesman, as Brasidas was. Alcibiades, after turning traitor, had said to the Spartans (vi. 93): "A Spartan commander I conceive to be even more indispensable than an army," i. e., for the Syracusans. Gylippus was just the man for the crisis. He began instantly to make energetic preparations, and was soon at Tarentum and Thurii, thinking to save South Italy at any rate, since all reports were that the Athenian lines round Syracuse were now complete. "Nicias heard of his approach, but despised the small number of his ships, thinking it a privateering expedition, and set no watch (vi. 104)." Landing at Himera, he began at once to draw allies to him, for "the impression got abroad," says Thucydides, "that he had come full of zeal (viii. 1)." A Corinthian ship-captain, who slipped into Syacuse at that time and announced Gylippus' approach, found the citizens on the point of holding an assembly about giving up the war, and when Gylippus forced his way in shortly after by way of Euryâlus, he found the Athenian wall of circumvallation all but complete. So near was Syracuse to destruction (c. 2).

How must Nicias have been startled at the arrogance of Gylippus' communication on the day of his arrival—"offering a truce if they were willing to quit Sicily within five days, taking what belonged to them (c. 3). Nicias in contempt made no reply, but some of his soldiers derisively asked the herald, "Does the presence of a Spartan cloak and staff make you so strong as to despise Athenians?" (Plutarch, *Nicias* 19). The next day Gylippus surprises and takes the fort Labdalon (c. 3). Defeated

a few days later in his first collision with the Athenians, he tells his troops, as General Lee told his after Antietam, "the fault was not theirs, but his," then leads them again next day to battle, and is victorious (c. 5 f.). The following night the Syracusans build their crosswall past the Athenian wall, thus forever preventing the circumvallation. Next the Corinthian Erasinides, eluding Nicias' guardships, sailed into Syracuse; Gylippus was off into various cities of Sicily to collect land and naval forces; ambassadors were despatched to Lacedæmon and Corinth asking for reinforcements; and the Syracusans were now manning a navy and practising with the intention of trying their hand at this new sort of warfare (c. 7). Verily a marvelous change had been wrought in the situation in an incredibly short time, in painful contrast to Nicias' course of action during the whole preceding winter; so that Nicias must presently confess in a letter to Athens, "We who are supposed to be besiegers are really the besieged (c. 11)." The next spring Gylippus attacks Plemmyrium from the land side, while the Syracusan fleet is engaged with that of the Athenians, and takes the three forts, this loss being one of the severest blows that befell the Athenians, causing discouragement and dismay throughout the army (cc. 22, 23). When the Syracusan fleet again attacks that of the Athenians in the Great Harbor, Gylippus lends material aid by a similar attack upon the Athenian fortifications (c. 37). After Demosthenes' failure in the night-attack on Epipolæ, Gylippus goes again into the rest of Sicily to get still more troops, "being now in hopes to carry the Athenian fortifications by storm (c. 46)."

In the speeches of the rival commanders on the eve of the final seafight in the Great Harbor, Thucydides portrays most effectively, by contrast, the situation and the mood of the two armies. Nicias (vii. 61-64) sums up the whole meaning of the supreme crisis in these words: "Stand firm, therefore, now if ever, and remember, one and all of you who are now embarking, that on you hangs the whole state and the great name of Athens; for her sake, if any man exceed another in skill or courage, let him display them now." That is the note of desperation. But the note with which men win battles is that of Gylippus (vii. 66-68): "You have set men the example of withstanding that invincible navy, which you have now defeated in several engagements, and which you will probably defeat in this. For when men are crippled in what they assume to be their strength, any

vestige of self-respect is more completely lost than if they had never believed in themselves at all. When once their pride has had a fall, they throw away the power of resistance which they might still exert. Far otherwise is it with us. Our natural courage, which even in the days of our inexperience dared to risk all, is now better assured, and when we go on to reflect that he is strongest who has overcome the strongest, the hopes of everyone are doubled. And in all enterprises the highest hopes infuse the greatest courage." "They are come," he adds, "into the desperate strait of risking a battle in such manner as they can, trusting more to fortune than to their own strength." In the measures taken to block the progress of the Athenians on the fatal retreat, Gylippus and Hermocrates are the joint leading spirits; their plans are conceived with skill and executed with merciless precision until at last the remnants of the whole vast host have been bagged or butchered.

We are accustomed to admire among Thucydides' great qualities as an historian his impartiality, his trustworthiness, vivid description, sense of contrast, conciseness, epigrammatic sententiousness, reserve, pathos. He is never a partisan, and the unsophisticated reader might at times wonder what his nationality was did he not frequently subscribe himself Thucydides the Athenian. Historians sometimes criticize his attitude, but they all accept his facts. His descriptions of battles read as if he himself had been present. He dramatizes history by placing events in such juxtaposition that a world of moral is conveyed without a word of comment; for example, when the funeral oration with its splendid eulogy of Athens is followed by the description of the plague, the disgraceful Melian episode is succeeded by the Sicilian disaster, the holiday-like departure from Athens is set over against the distressful flight from Syracuse. He packs his language so full of meaning that at times a sentence does duty for a paragraph, a word for a sentence. His political wisdom finds expression so epigrammatic and weighty that the Earl of Chatham might well call his work "that eternal manual of statesmen." "Of all manifestations of power, self-restraint impresses men most," and however much we may regret his reserve,—since for much that he might have told us we have no other witness,—I have come to regard this as really great art. As for pathos, no historian ever excelled such passages as those where the utter defeat of a hitherto invincible navy is

portrayed (VII. 71), or the misery and dejection of the departing Athenian host is described (c. 75), or the final catastrophe in the river Assinarus seems to occur before our eyes (c. 84), preparing us for the final sentence: "Fleet and army perished from the face of the earth; nothing was saved, and of the many who went forth few returned home." In the exhibition of all these qualities Thucydides is supremely great. Is it too much to claim that also in the drawing of characters like Brasidas and Nicias—not in what he says, rather in what he does not say, but makes facts say—Thucydides is a great master?

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